

# News Release

# Senator Pete V. Domenici

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DOMENICI WELCOMES RICHARDSON'S COMMITMENT TO GET BEHIND DOE, LAB SECURITY REFORMS

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today welcomed Energy Secretary Bill Richardson's repeated commitments to now follow the law by implementing a new management and security structure for the nation's nuclear weapons complex, hopefully ending administration obstructions to this Domenici initiative.

Domenici, chairman of the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Energy, today participated in a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the security lapses at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

During his testimony, Richardson committed to follow the law creating the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the new semi-autonomous Department of Energy agency created by Congress last October to oversee a massive management overhaul of the nation's nuclear weapons complex. Domenici, a leading architect of the NNSA, has been frustrated by delays and obstructions by the Clinton administration to meet the letter of the NNSA statute.

"Now that we have confirmed General John Gordon to be the first administrator, I believe Congress should act as soon as possible to give him a clear playing field to implement the NNSA," Domenici said. "I will pull the transcript of today's hearing and reread it, because the best thing Secretary Richardson could do to leave a legacy for America on nuclear weapons is say, 'I have created a semi-autonomous agency, with General John Gordon in charge, no dual-hatting.'"

"It has been difficult to get anything done because of the DOE bureaucracy. It is enmeshed in a dysfunctional way with all the rules and regulations established for the department," he said.

"I hope we will leave here, bound as Republicans and Democrats, saying it is too important to argue over Secretary Richardson's early ideas on the autonomy of this agency. The ongoing security problems have pretty much diffused them. It is so bleak out there that we better try something new that can be enforced in a way where people are responsible and accountable and not subject to what has been described over and over again as a dysfunctional department," he said.

Domenici indicated that he will attempt to have legislative amendments to the structure of the NNSA, now incorporated into the FY2001 Defense Authorization Bill,

move into the emergency defense supplemental appropriations bill now pending in Congress. The provisions would work to restrict the ability of the Energy Secretary to change the organization of the NNSA as mandated in the law that created the agency, and would prohibit “dual-hat” positions—or allowing staff to serve in both DOE and the NNSA.

During today’s hearing, Richardson testified that he would comply with these changes.

Last October, President Clinton signed into law the legislation that created the semi-autonomous NNSA within DOE to manage the U.S. nuclear weapons complex. The NNSA, the brainchild of Domenici, Senators Jon Kyl, Frank Murkowski, John Warner and others, will provide streamlined management for the DOE nuclear weapons laboratories and related facilities, naval reactors, nonproliferation and materials disposition, and weapons counter-intelligence and security measures.

Formation of the NNSA closely followed the recommendations of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), which studied the DOE’s management of the national laboratories in the wake of allegations of Chinese espionage. The PFIAB report reconfirmed other previous reports citing security breeches and a DOE managerial system that fostered a rampant lack of accountability at the national labs and throughout DOE.

The Senate last week unanimously confirmed Air Force Gen. Gordon to become the first head of the NNSA.